

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1-AWASHINGTON TIMES
5 November 1985

U.S. officials scoff at story, seek talks with Yurchenko

By Tom Diaz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Vitaly Yurchenko, who defected in August from a top post in the Soviet KGB, said yesterday that he was "forcibly abducted" while visiting Rome, drugged and brought to the United States against his will.

U.S. officials scoffed at Mr. Yurchenko's claim of abduction and said

they want to meet with the defector at a neutral site to decide whether he really wants to return to the Soviet Union.

Mr. Yurchenko seemed tired, and though he first told reporters in heavily accented English that he preferred to answer them in Russian through an interpreter, he often broke into the translation to answer questions in English. Toward the end

of the hour-long session his answers often rambled.

"Here I was kept in isolation, forced to take some drugs and denied an opportunity to get in touch with Soviet representatives," Mr. Yurchenko told a remarkable and rare press conference at the Soviet Embassy.

He said he escaped last Saturday from a CIA compound near Fredericksburg, Va., and made his way to the Soviet Embassy in Northwest Washington.

"At no time was Mr. Yurchenko held or coerced by improper, illegal or unethical means," the State Department said in a statement approved by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, now in Moscow.

The statement dismissed Mr. Yurchenko's story as "completely false and without any foundation."

"It is Mr. Yurchenko's right to return to the Soviet Union once the United States government is, in fact, assured that this action is genuinely of his own choosing," the statement said. "We will insist on a meeting with him in an environment free of Soviet coercion to satisfy ourselves about his real intentions."

The head of the Senate Intelligence Committee also dismissed Mr. Yurchenko's story.

"We're not druggers or kidnapers," said Sen. David Durenberger, Minnesota Republican. "The information that he gave us that we've checked, checks out."

Arkady Shevchenko, a prominent Soviet defector, said in a television interview last night that Mr. Yurchenko was "deliberately lying."

"The CIA would never use any kinds of drugs or torture," he said. "I think he's deliberately lying. I think he's just changed his mind. He's buying his way home. He has to justify his actions."

Last month the State Department said that Mr. Yurchenko had been deputy chief of the KGB's North American Department, then the No. 5 position in the Soviet intelligence agency.

He was "specifically responsible for KGB intelligence operations in the United States and Canada," the State Department said.

Intelligence sources have said that the defector has been a fount of useful information — some but by no means all extremely damaging to the Soviet Union. Among other things, he was said to have fingered several CIA officers suspected of spying for the Soviet Union, including

a former operations officer, Edward Lee Howard, who fled the country while under U.S. government surveillance.

Mr. Yurchenko declined to answer questions yesterday about his role in the KGB.

"It is well known that I worked here for five years as a security person in the embassy," he said. "[But] I'm not going to make any comments about the spying business."

"In periods when I was conscious and controlled my behavior, I did not pass any [classified] information," he said. "[But] when I was drugged with the use of special drugs, I don't know what . . . I was doing."

Mr. Yurchenko said he met and had dinner with CIA Director William Casey in Mr. Casey's penthouse office at CIA headquarters in Langley, Va. But he said that he was drugged several hours before the meeting and has only a "vague rec-

ollection" of the conversation, which concerned "big policy issues regarding the summit, the kind they write about in the newspapers."

He said that CIA officials showed him statements in his own handwriting and played recordings of their conversations with him, telling him that he had given them secret information and "everyone thinks you're a traitor." And, he said, he was "threatened" and told that if he tried to return to the Soviet Union, the CIA would turn over to the KGB all of the information he had provided, thus assuring his execution as a spy.

But a Johns Hopkins University Soviet specialist said Mr. Yurchenko probably is trying to "minimize the disaster" that he will face on his return to the Soviet Union.

"His statements weren't credible," said Jonathan Haslam. "It's a good way of covering up what he did tell them."

U.S. officials were apparently surprised by the hastily called press conference, and declined to explain how the defector had slipped out of U.S. hands.

Staff writer James Morrison contributed to this report.